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TAGS: CMGT CVIS PREL ETRD BEXP CH
SUBJECT: CHINA: CA PDAS Kirby's Visit to Guangzhou

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: CA PDAS Michael Kirby, accompanied by MCCA Linda Donahue (Beijing), visited Guangzhou on February 23-24 for an update on Consulate General Guangzhou's consular operation, particularly the growing demand for consular services in the "workshop of the world," the Pearl River Delta region of Guangdong Province. PDAS Kirby called on officials at Guangdong's Foreign Affairs Office, where he thanked them for their continued support for the construction of the new consulate, reaffirmed U.S. commitment to facilitate China/U.S. trade and exchange, and inquired about China's goals to implement green, energy-efficient technology. He also exchanged views and ideas on the visa process with leading U.S. business community representatives at a reception hosted by the Consul General.

¶2. (SBU) Throughout his visit, PDAS Kirby emphasized the construction of the new consulate as an example of how the U.S. is planning for and preparing to meet the growing demand for consular services. PDAS Kirby highlighted that in 2009, almost half a million people applied for U.S. nonimmigrant visas in China with a better than 80 percent approval rate, and that almost 20 percent were Chinese students going to study in U.S. universities. He also emphasized that the new electronic visa application system will be even faster, easier, and more environmentally friendly. The CG and the Consulate's Agency/Section Chiefs briefed PDAS Kirby, and he toured the Consular Section's facilities, as well as the site of the new consulate, scheduled for completion in January 2013. End summary.

Emphasizing the importance of consular work

¶3. (U) PDAS Kirby toured the Consular Section's facilities, where he met with 22 entry level officers (ELO) and 63 locally engaged staff (LES) to express appreciation and support for their efforts, and to emphasize the importance of consular work in the Department, from the Secretary on down. During the meeting with ELOs, he gave valuable skills-building and career advice, commented on how CA is seeking to expand employment opportunities for eligible family members (EFMs), and took note of near-term budgetary challenges and possible implications for consular work. PDAS Kirby also toured the site of the new consulate, scheduled for completion in January 2013;

the consular section will feature about 65 public service windows, about 50 percent more than the 43 windows in the current facility.

Supporting the local U.S. business community

14. (U) At a reception hosted by the Consul General, PDAS Kirby met with seven leading representatives of the U.S. business community in south China. PDAS Kirby pledged continued support for travel and trade, exchanged views and ideas about the visa process, and explored ways to encourage demand for visas in a growing economy. In addition to the president of the local American Chamber of Commerce, U.S. companies represented included General Electric, Wrigley, Amway, Huntsman, California Travel and Tourism Commission, and AECOM. The feedback from the business representatives was positive, as they expressed appreciation for the Consulate's support for commercial exchanges, as well as the facilitation of visa services for business travelers to the U.S.

15. (U) The business representatives believe that south China will continue to prosper economically, and that the number of people able and qualified to travel to the United States is growing rapidly. In response to PDAS Kirby's question about why more Chinese people do not apply for visas despite the greater than 80 percent approval rate and low wait times, several of the representatives agreed that there is a gap between perception and reality: Chinese people often fear losing face in a visa line and/or being refused a visa. PDAS Kirby highlighted the construction of the new consulate in Guangzhou as an example of how the U.S. is taking steps to meet this growing demand for visa services. He also discussed ways in which public outreach might help to close the perception/reality gap.

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Exploring opportunities for U.S.-China cooperation

16. (SBU) PDAS Kirby met with the Director General of Guangdong Foreign Affairs Office (FAO), Fu Lang, to assure the FAO of our continued interest in strengthening mutual support and cooperation. Fu Lang began the meeting by highlighting the special relationship China has with the United States as its main trading partner, stating that one-third of China's trade is conducted with the United States. He discussed the current economic situation in Guangdong, noting that the economic growth rate is one percent higher than growth rates in other parts of China, and that per capita GDP in the province has risen to US\$10,000. Fu Lang remarked that this figure represented a dramatic increase in just a few years, and that per capita income will probably continue to rise.

17. (SBU) PDAS Kirby congratulated Fu Lang on Guangdong's economic success, and pledged continued cooperation and support in facilitating joint trade and travel. He emphasized that the United States welcomes Chinese people, noting that the new electronic visa application system will also make the application process faster, easier, and more environmentally friendly. He expressed his appreciation for the FAO's continuing support for the construction of the new consulate, which will have 50% more consular windows and new technology designed to improve the visa application process.

18. (SBU) PDAS Kirby expressed his concern about police protection and judicial fairness for Amcits caught in business disputes in China. Fu Lang agreed that both countries have an important interest in the safety and welfare of their citizens overseas, and the discussion expanded to include other concerns associated with rapid economic development in China, such as illegal immigrants, drug trafficking, and Internet scams. PDAS Kirby inquired about China's plans to implement energy-efficient technology, and Fu Lang responded that he believes China will take more steps to reduce pollution by making greater use of solar power and green energy. Fu Lang also cited the development of public transport, i.e., high speed railways and metro lines, as ways in which the Chinese government is working to reduce pollution and alleviate traffic

congestion. Both PDAS Kirby and Fu Lang agreed that there were growing opportunities for mutual support and cooperation between the United States and China.

¶9. (U) This cable was cleared with PDAS Kirby and MCCA Donahue.

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